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METAPHOR

Richard Moran

Metaphor enters contemporary philosophical discussion from a variety of directions. Aside from its obvious importance in poetics, rhetoric, and aesthetics, it also figures in such fields as philosophy of mind (e.g., the question of the metaphorical status of ordinary mental concepts), philosophy of science (e.g. the comparison of metaphors and explanatory models), in epistemology (e.g., analogical reasoning), and in cognitive studies (in, e.g., the theory of concept-formation). This article will concentrate on issues metaphor raises for the philosophy of language, with the understanding that the issues in these various fields cannot be wholly isolated from each other. Metaphor is an issue for the philosophy of language not only for its own sake, as a linguistic phenomenon deserving of analysis and interpretation, but also for the light it sheds on non-figurative language, the domain of the literal which is the normal preoccupation of the philosopher of language. A poor reason for this preoccupation would be the assumption that purely literal language is what most language-use consists in, with metaphor and the like sharing the relative infrequency and marginal status of songs or riddles. This would not be a good reason not only because mere frequency is not a good guide to theoretical importance, but also because it is doubtful that the assumption is even true. In recent years, writers with very different concerns have pointed out that figurative language of one sort or another is a staple of the most

common as well as the most specialized speech, as the brief list of directions of interest leading to metaphor would suggest. A better reason for the philosopher's concentration on the case of literal language would be the idea that the literal does occupy some privileged theoretical place in the understanding of language generally because the comprehension of figurative language is itself dependent in specific ways on the literal understanding of the words used. This is at least a defensible claim, and if true, we might then hope for an understanding of figurative language from a theory of literal meaning combined with an account of the ways in which the figurative both depends on and deviates from it.

The light such an investigation may shed on non-figurative language will derive from the issues which even this mere sketch of their relation raises for the philosophy of language. We will want to know, for instance, about the specific nature of the dependence of the figurative on the literal; and how the comprehension of figurative language is related to, and different from, the understanding of the literal meanings of the words involved. If the theory of meaning in language is, at the least, closely allied with the theory of what understanding such things as sentences consists in, then a question raised by metaphor is how understanding as applied to metaphorical speech is related to understanding in this semantic sense, and whether the same kind of knowledge (e.g., whatever it is that 'knowing a language' consists in) applies in similar ways in the two cases. We will want to consider reasons for and against speaking of a difference in MEANING in connection with metaphor, and whether such distinctive meaning is to be sought for on the level of the word, sentence or utterance; on the level of SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS or somewhere else.

1. Figurative and Non-Figurative: Metaphor, Idiom, and Ambiguity

The familiar subject-predicate form ('X is a wolf, the sun, a vulture ...') comprises but one class of metaphors, and neglects various other grammatical forms (e.g., 'rosy fingered dawn' or 'plowing through the discussion'), not to mention metaphoric contexts which don't involve assertion at all. And in general short, handy examples will not help much in the understanding of, e.g., literary metaphors whose networks of implications are not discernible outside the verbal environment of a particular text or genre. Nonetheless, even such simple cases can help us to make some provisional distinctions between metaphor and other figurative and non-figurative language. For instance, idioms, such as 'to kick the bucket' or 'to butter someone up' resemble metaphors in calling for a special reading. If one understands such expressions correctly, one will not expect reference to have been made to any actual bucket or real butter. In a word, they are to be taken figuratively and not literally. (This is so, even though, for instance, there is hardly anything wildly paradoxical in the idea of someone kicking a genuine bucket). But although they both involve giving figurative readings to an utterance, there are important differences in how one comprehends the meaning of an idiomatic expression and the meaning of a metaphor. If you don't know what 'vulture' means or what plowing is, you won't be able to interpret their metaphorical expressions at all. And what one does when one interprets the metaphor is employ what one knows about vultures and what is believed about them to determine what the utterance means on this occasion. This is part of what is meant by the previous suggestion that the comprehension of figurative language is dependent on the literal understanding of the words used.

If idiom is to count as a case of figurative language (which it seems it should, since we can distinguish what it is literally to kick the bucket and the very different thing usually meant by the expression), then this claim of dependence on the literal will have to be amended. For an understanding of the literal meanings of the words that make up an idiom is of very limited usefulness in understanding what is meant, and is sometimes even positively detrimental to such understanding. Someone unfamiliar with the expression will not get very far by employing his understanding of what is known or believed about buckets etc. to figure out what the expression means. And further, if she does know much about the literal meaning of a word like 'moot', for instance, then, other things being equal, this may well render her less rather than more likely to understand what is meant by the (American) idiomatic labeling of something as a moot point. What this means is that the meaning of an idiomatic expression is not a function of the meanings of the individual words that compose it. Unlike metaphors, they are simply taught to us as wholes, rather than being a matter of individual interpretation on an occasion. (For such reasons, it has been said that "An idiom has no semantic structure; rather it is a semantic primitive.", Davies 1982, p. 68. See also Dammann 1977.) And again, unlike metaphors, their meaning is simply given: there is no 'open-ended' quality to the idiom's meaning, no special suggestiveness, no call for its creative elaboration. There is a simple, stable answer to the question of what 'kick the bucket' means idiomatically, and that is why dictionaries can have special sections in them for idioms, but not for metaphors. (See Cavell 1969)

Finally, the contrast with idiom enables us to distinguish some issues here concerning paraphrase. It is often said that metaphors, or at least poetic, 'live' metaphors, are not subject to paraphrase, and this is often taken to mean that they are not translatable into another language.

However, there is one sense in which it is idioms and not metaphors which resist translation into another language. The overall effectiveness of certain literary metaphors will, to be sure, be influenced by certain language-specific phonetic features; but nonetheless, referring metaphorically to someone as, say, 'shoveling food into his mouth' will be possible wherever they have shovels and food, and words for these things. By contrast, translating the words of the idiom 'to kick the bucket' into Spanish or Korean will not be likely to get across your meaning, or any other meaning. The reason for this, again, is the 'semantic primitiveness' of idiomatic phrases. Since an idiom's meaning is not built up from the meaning of its individual words, its meaning will not be conveyed in another language by means of word by word translation (see Dammann 1977). Naturally this doesn't mean that some perfectly good sense of 'translation' is not appropriate here. If 'kick the bucket' is one way in English of saying that someone died, then there will be perfectly good ways of translating that idea into Spanish or Korean. So resistance to word by word translation is not the same as the inability to express the meaning of the idiom in words of another language.

One way in which the issue of the translatability of poetic metaphor is vexed is through confusion about what might be meant by the idea of a word's acquiring a specifically 'metaphorical meaning', and this idea will be discussed at some length later. But in addition there is some unclarity about the relation between paraphrase and translation. If all we mean by paraphrase is the ability to say what one means in other words, then it does seem true that there is a difference between idiom and metaphor here. For, as described above, the idiomatic meaning of some expression can be given in other words in a quite straightforward and definite manner. (Many idioms are euphemisms, after all, whose literal equivalents are all too straightforward.)

By contrast, the paraphrase of a live metaphor is much less definite, more open-ended, more dependent on context (including the individual speaker), and more open to the creative interpretation and elaboration of the hearer. What should be noted, however, is that these are all features of the paraphrase of metaphor within a language, and do not carry over any immediate implications for the translation of metaphors across languages. Familiar ideas about the 'essential incompleteness' of any prose paraphrase of metaphor should not cloud the issue, for there is no reason in principle why the very same indefiniteness and open-ended character of a metaphor in English should not show up in its version in another language. Translation need have nothing to do with reducing the live metaphor to a prose paraphrase. And if it is argued that even good translation will not capture all and only the connotations and associations of the original metaphor, it may be replied that to the extent that this is true at all, it will apply to cases of perfectly literal language as well, from 'Gemütlichkeit' to 'priggish'. To sum up, within a language: the idiomatic meaning of an expression may be completely given by its literal equivalent, whereas the live metaphor is not reducible to its prose paraphrase. And across languages: an idiom cannot be translated word by word, but only as a fused whole; whereas word by word translation of a metaphorical expression may, in fortunate circumstances, preserve the same suggestiveness and 'open texture' as the original. Insofar as metaphor involves the comparison of things and ideas with other things and ideas, it is something less specifically language-bound than is idiom.

In this respect metaphors also differ from puns, homonyms, and ordinary ambiguity in language. A pun in English, like 'heart' and 'hart', may be metaphorically exploited by a poet, but is only a homophonic accident until it is so exploited. A translation of the play into another

language may well display the same metaphoric comparison, but naturally the phonetic motivation for making just this comparison will be lost with the homophony. Sometimes homophonic words are not only pronounced the same but are also spelled the same, and then we have true homonyms like 'cape' for a body of land and an article of clothing. An inscription such as 'cape' is ambiguous between the two meanings, which need not be etymologically related at all, and once again this ambiguity may be metaphorically exploited. But neither puns nor homonyms are in themselves examples of figurative language. 'Cape' has (at least) two meanings, but they are both perfectly literal ones, and understanding one of the meanings provides no interpretive clue to the other one.

2. Metaphorical Meaning

Even this brief characterization raises deep theoretical issues, insofar as it has appealed to some notion of 'figurative meaning' at various different stages. In metaphor, we interpret an utterance as meaning something different from what the words would mean taken literally. Often we will want to say that a statement which is wildly false when taken literally is quite true when taken figuratively. And from here it is natural to reason in the following way. Truth-values cannot vary unless TRUTH-CONDITIONS vary, and if the truth-conditions of an utterance are what determine its meaning, then the literal and the metaphorical interpretations of an utterance amount to differences in meaning. The words, or the utterance, have one meaning when intended or taken literally, and another when spoken metaphorically. In addition it was argued, in connection with idiom, that a metaphor can be translated into another language while

preserving its metaphorical meaning, and in his original 1962 paper Max Black takes this to imply that "to call a sentence an instance of metaphor is to say something about its meaning, not about its orthography, its phonetic pattern, or its grammatical form." (p. 28).

Thus, some of the motivation for talking about 'meaning shift' in connection with metaphor is clear enough, and it seems equally undeniable that quite often everyday metaphorical speech is successful at communicating something different from what the words, on their literal interpretation, would mean. But our brief characterization of metaphor, especially in its contrast with idiom and common ambiguity, already raises some serious questions for this way of talking about metaphor. For it was pointed out that, unlike the cases of 'kick the bucket' or 'cape', the different reading we give to 'vulture' (when used, say, to refer to a certain kind of human predator) is directly dependent on our understanding of the literal meanings of the individual words. Unlike an ambiguous word like 'cape' then, in metaphor the two meanings must be related somehow. When a TOKEN of 'cape' is re-interpreted as having one meaning rather than another, the meaning assigned to it on the first reading is excluded, and nothing in the first reading (other than one's dawning sense of its inappropriateness) plays a role in bringing one to the second interpretation. In principle, and often enough in practice, the reader could have hit on the correct interpretation the first time, without considering any possible ambiguity, and nothing would have been thereby lost in her comprehension of what was said.

Such cases of ambiguity explain some of the motivation for individuating words according to sameness of meanings, rather than according to sameness of spelling or pronunciation. (Hence, on this view, the two 'capes' count as different words.) For a speaker does not clarify her intentions by saying she employed the same word 'bank' (encompassing both

meanings) on one occasion to refer to part of the river and on another occasion to refer to where she keeps her money. There is no point expressed in using the 'same word' in these different ways. For the two words are hardly more related in meaning than are 'kinder' in English and 'Kinder' in German. In neither this case, nor the case with 'bank' need the orthographic identity ever have occurred to the speaker in order to use the words correctly and to communicate her meaning fully.

Contrast this with the case of metaphor. If we think of the words of a metaphorical expression as undergoing a 'meaning-shift' of some kind, it will have to involve a difference of meaning very different from that involved in ordinary ambiguity. For when an expression is interpreted metaphorically, the first interpretation (the literal one) is not canceled or removed from consideration. The literal meaning of 'vulture' is not dispensable when we interpret it metaphorically in its application to some friend or relation. The literal meaning must be known to both the speaker and the audience for the metaphorical point of the epithet to be made. And it has everything to do with clarifying the speaker's intentions that she chose this word, with its literal meaning applying to a kind of bird, to refer to this other thing which is not a bird. And when we start to figure out the reason why the speaker is using this word with its literal meaning in this context, we have begun to interpret what she is intending to get across metaphorically. Simply characterizing metaphor in terms of a change of meaning fails to capture the role of the original, literal meaning.

But the dependence of the metaphorical on the literal runs deeper than this, and raises further doubts about the appropriateness of the idea of 'meaning shift' in metaphor. For the description of interpretation given so far might apply just as well to a situation in which a person

is speaking in a kind of code, in which someone has to interpret her utterance in such a way that certain words are to be replaced by specific other ones. He might conjecture that 'vulture' is one of these words and hit upon the right substitution for it. In such a case we might well speak of the word 'vulture' being given a different meaning or application in this context. The case of metaphor differs from this in several ways. First, and perhaps most obviously, there is nothing corresponding to a code for a live metaphor, and no rules to appeal to for going from the literal to the metaphorical meaning. Further, in the case of genuine codes the original meaning of the words will normally be incidental at best to the new meaning; and in fact, a coined expression with no previous meaning in the language may do just as well, if not better. In metaphor, on the other hand, if we are to speak of a new meaning, this meaning will be something reachable only through comprehension of the previously established literal meanings of the particular words that make it up. And this dependence of the metaphorical on the literal is rather special, in ways that exacerbate difficulties with the view of metaphor as involving a change of meaning. For the first (literal) reading of the expression does not just provide clues to help one get to the second one, like a ladder that is later kicked away, but instead remains somehow 'active' in the new metaphorical interpretation. It is not similar to a case in which we first got the meaning wrong and have now successfully disambiguated it. Rather, the literal meaning of 'vulture' remains an essential part of the meaning of the metaphorical expression, otherwise one will have no sense of what metaphorical comparison is intended. If something like 'meaning-shift' is involved in this, then we must explain how the literal meaning of 'vulture' could play any role at all in the generation and comprehension of the metaphorical meaning, if it is this very same original meaning that is supposed to have changed (or, to speak a bit less confusingly, if the word has

now taken on a different meaning).

It might be thought that we could avoid this problem by referring to an expansion rather than a change of meaning. That way we could retain and rely on the original meaning of the words, and still describe what is going on in terms of some change of meaning. So, for instance, 'vulture' still refers to the same birds it always did, but now, in addition, it also refers to a certain kind of person. The problem with this idea is that while it describes a certain process of linguistic change, it simply isn't what is meant by live metaphor. Words commonly expand and contract in application over time, and this process can take many forms, some of which may indeed involve metaphor at some stage. But the process itself is not inherently metaphorical, and can proceed for any number of reasons. In earlier times, the word 'engine' applied more narrowly to instruments of war and torture, and not generally to any mechanism that converts energy into force or motion. This expansion in application does not make the latter (contemporary) use metaphorical, even if we think that, for instance, certain relations of perceived similarity played a role in the expansion. And in any case, what any such analysis of 'meaning change' in terms of merely extended application leaves out of consideration is the point insisted on above, the special dependence of the metaphorical on the literal which makes the literal meaning of a word such as 'vulture' still 'active' in the comprehension of its metaphorical use. We are still in need of an account of this 'activity', to be sure, but there is certainly an essential functional role for the awareness of the literal meaning of 'vulture' in the comprehension of its metaphorical use, which has no parallel in the understanding of various other predicates with extended applications. So we still lack an explanation of what could be meant in speaking of 'change of meaning' in connection with metaphor.

(These questions will require answers just as much on an account that appeals to speaker-meaning rather than semantic meaning (Searle 1979, and Black 1979) and also to 'extensionalist' accounts which eschew talk of 'meanings' altogether in favor of reference to different applications of labels [see Goodman 1968, Elgin 1983, and Scheffler 1979]).

3. Davidson and the Case Against Metaphorical Meaning

How might we characterize the dependence of the metaphorical on the literal, specifically the way in which the literal meaning is still 'alive' in the metaphorical application, and avoid making reference to a new metaphorical meaning? And, on the other hand, if we do avoid all such reference, how can we account for the difference in truth value between the utterance taken literally and taken metaphorically? Further, if we drop all reference to meaning, then it will be quite unclear how we can make sense of the idea that we correctly understand the speaker as saying (or meaning) something different from what her words literally mean, or see metaphor as a vehicle of communication at all.

In a paper that has attracted a great deal of commentary, Donald Davidson has taken this step and argued that we should indeed cease talking about figurative meaning in connection with metaphor altogether, and he seems prepared to accept the consequences that follow from this rejection. Early on he states the thesis of the paper as the claim that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more." (p. 246) He does not mean to deny that metaphor accomplishes many of the same things that philosophers and literary critics have claimed for metaphor (e.g., the special suggestive power of poetic metaphor, or its capacity

to produce insight of a sort that may not be capturable in plain prose), but he denies that these accomplishments have anything to do with content or meaning of a non-literal sort. It will be useful to look more closely at Davidson's paper, for it is an especially forthright and radical response to many of the same problems in accounting for 'metaphorical meaning' that have emerged elsewhere in recent literature on the subject. At the same time we can gain a better appreciation of the costs as well as the benefits of rejecting 'metaphorical meaning'. (Davidson's paper is discussed in Cooper 1986, Davies 1982, Fogelin 1988, Moran 1989, Stern 1991, and the responses by Black and Goodman in Sacks 1979.)

The argumentative structure of the paper is not always easy to interpret, but Davidson gives a number of reasons for the denial of metaphorical meaning, some of which are related to the argument given above, contrasting metaphor with common ambiguity. He further argues that positing metaphorical meanings does nothing to explain how metaphors function in speech. If, as he says, a metaphor makes us attend to certain covert features of resemblance (p. 247), it tells us nothing about how this is accomplished to claim that the words involved have some figurative meaning in addition to the literal one. It is not only more accurate simply to say that a fresh metaphor typically produces such effects (in whatever causal manner anything else might do so), but it also more economical, for we are thereby spared the need to account for what these special meanings are and where they come from. In an ordinary literal context appeal to meaning can be genuinely explanatory because there we can have a firm grip on the distinction between what the words mean in the language and what they may be used to do on a particular occasion (e.g., to lie, to encourage, or to complain). However, if we think of what metaphorical language is used to do (e.g., make us appreciate some incongruous similarity) as itself being a kind of 'meaning',

we lose any sense of the distinction. And yet one of the theoretical virtues of appeal to semantic meaning in the first place is that it enables us to explain something of how these words, with this established meaning and in this context, can be used to perform this particular function on this occasion. That is, a particular established meaning provides both constraints on and possibilities for what a word or phrase may be used to do, and for this reason appeal to such meaning (once it is determined by a given context) can be genuinely explanatory of what the phrase is on this occasion used to do. But the only meaning distinct and independent of the use on this occasion, which could play any such explanatory role, is the literal meaning of the phrase. (Various writers have criticized Davidson's argument for assuming a concept of literal meaning that is utterly independent of context, but it seems clear that this is not his view. See p. 260.)

In addition, Davidson argues, when we think of metaphor in terms of the communication of a specific propositional content, we can only have in mind the most dead of dead metaphors, such as referring to the 'leg' of a table. And these, he suggests, are not properly metaphors at all. If the expression 'figurative meaning' points to anything at all, it indicates some special power of metaphor, some striking quality that may be productive of insight or creative elaboration on the part of the audience. The failure to capture anything about the distinctively figurative functioning of live metaphor Davidson sees as a further defect of the idea discussed earlier that the meaning or application of a term is 'extended' in a metaphorical context. For if we say that the literal application of an expression such as 'vulture' is extended, we have first of all said something false, or at best misleading: as if now both some birds and some people were straightforwardly vultures, the way both vultures and sparrows are straightforwardly birds. And in addition, for our trouble, we have failed thereby to capture anything figurative about the whole

process. And then, on the other hand, if we say that the metaphorical application of the term has been extended, then we seem to have got no further in our analysis. For we now owe an explanation of what a metaphorical application is, and specifically, how it differs from any other type of application of a term.

(For a different perspective on what are normally thought of as dead metaphors, see Lakoff and Johnson (1980).)

4. Paraphrase and Propositional Status

The concentration on live metaphor is bound up with another strand of Davidson's case against metaphorical meaning, but one for which it is difficult to determine the weight he wants to give to the considerations he brings forward. Whatever makes a poetic metaphor 'live', it is certainly in large part a function of its power of suggestiveness, the fact that the interpretation of live metaphor is open-ended, indeterminate, and not fixed by rules. As Davidson says at the beginning of his essay, "there are no instructions for devising metaphors; there is no manual for determining what a metaphor 'means' or 'says'; there is no test for metaphor that does not call for taste." (p. 245) The creative indeterminacy of live metaphor is one reason why live and dead metaphors differ with respect to the possibilities for paraphrase, or specifying the meaning in other words. We can fully state what is meant by the 'shoulder' of a road, precisely to the extent that there isn't anything figurative left to the expression. With genuine, or poetic, metaphor the case is quite different, and at various points Davidson seems to be asking, 'How could the sort of open-ended, non-rule-governed character of live metaphor possibly apply to anything

legitimately called a meaning?' When we encounter difficulties in applying paraphrase to live metaphor the reason for this is simply that "there is nothing there to paraphrase." (p. 246) If there were anything said or asserted in the metaphorical expression beyond what it literally states, then it would be just the sort of thing that does submit to paraphrase. As it is, however, what it provides us with beyond the literal is not anything propositional at all.

It should make us suspect the theory that it is so hard to decide, even in the case of the simplest metaphors, exactly what the content is supposed to be. The reason it is often so hard to decide is, I think, that we imagine there is a content to be captured when all the while we are in fact focusing on what the metaphor makes us notice. If what the metaphor makes us notice were finite in scope and propositional in nature, this would not in itself make trouble; we would simply project the content the metaphor brought to mind on to the metaphor. But in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character. (pp. 262-3)

In this passage, however, Davidson seems to allow that reference to a kind of meaning distinct from the literal would be legitimate if what the utterance got across were "finite in scope and propositional in nature". Then presumably we could get a handle on paraphrase, and we could start talking about what was said and what was meant. It was said earlier that it is difficult to settle how much Davidson wants to rest on these considerations; and the reason for this is that, although they run through the entire paper, he also freely admits that it may just as well be said of literal language that its interpretation is not determined by rules (p. 245), and that what it gets across to the audience is often not "finite in scope" (p. 263 n. 17). And certainly no theorist wants to deny meaning or cognitive content there. (And as far as putting into other words goes, we might also ask how one would paraphrase many perfectly literal statements, such as "The sky

is blue' or 'I can hear you now'.) Nor should simple vagueness or indeterminacy in interpretation be thought of as crucial to the issue of meaning, for vagueness itself can be something fixed by the dictionary-meaning of a term. For instance, 'house' is a word with a perfectly straightforward meaning, but which allows for a zone of indeterminacy as to just which structures shall count as houses.

If there is to be a genuine case against metaphorical meaning along these lines then, it seems we should see the crux of the issue not as concerning indefiniteness as such, but as concerning the question of whether we may speak of propositional content in connection with metaphor. It is certainly true, as Davidson says, that "much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character", but it does not follow from this that the figurative process does not communicate anything that is propositional as well. It seems clear that part of what traditionally raises philosophers' suspicions about the propositional content of poetic metaphor is not the assumption of an incompatibility of content with indeterminacy, but rather the connection of this aspect of the figurative dimension of metaphor with ideas of ineffability, or the essential inability to capture this dimension in words other than those of the specific metaphor itself. When a content or a thought is held to be ineffable, and not simply indeterminate, it is felt that, although one may have a perfectly definite content in mind, it cannot be verbally expressed, or not fully. (In fact, in various contexts the sense of indescribability is a response to the highly determinate character, the utter specificity, of what one has in mind.) Or, as in the case of certain poetic metaphors, it may be felt that the idea may be verbally expressed, but only in these very words; or only indirectly expressed, or incompletely hinted at. This sense is certainly something different from simple vagueness, and does raise different questions for the idea that what live

metaphor does is communicate some special propositional content. If we agree with Davidson that this problem removes any justification for looking for propositions expressed by metaphorical utterances, then we may still say all we like about the various non-cognitive effects of such utterances, but we will no longer be able to describe metaphor in terms of communication, meaning, or content.

However, ineffability, of the sort under consideration here, concerns a claim about the specifically linguistic representation of a thought, and does not immediately place something outside the bounds of the propositional unless we have already agreed that a proposition is something essentially linguistic or sentential. Only then will it seem obvious that accepting an equivalent prose paraphrase is necessary for any part of the metaphor to count as a propositional content. Davidson could be correct when he says "A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture." (p. 263), but it wouldn't follow from this that a picture cannot itself be a representation of a propositional content. For on one standard view of what propositions are, they are "functions from possible worlds into truth values" (Stalnaker 1972); and on such an account (whether or not it takes reference to 'possible worlds' at face value) pictures, maps, memories or anything else that represents the world as being some way can qualify as propositional representations. (We may thus, in Stalnaker's words, "abstract the study of propositions from the study of language".) If one takes this wider view of what a proposition is, there may be less resistance to considering the possibility of someone with a particular cognitive content in mind, but who is either unwilling or unable to accept an equivalent of it in prosaic language. We could accept Davidson's point about translation into another representational medium, without accepting the identification of the

propositional with the sentential.

In fact, for purposes of this discussion, there would be little to complain of in the restriction of propositional content to the meaning of sentences, so long as we kept in mind the various different ways in which the content of a sentence may be indicated and determined in a context, including making essential reference to something extra-linguistic. We may note that many belief-reports are only partially verbal reports, with the essential content of the belief being indicated in some other way:

Many of our beliefs have the form: 'The color of her hair is ---', or 'The song he was singing went ---', where the blanks are filled with images, sensory impressions, or what have you, but certainly not words. If we cannot even say it with words but have to paint it or sing it, we certainly cannot believe it with words.

(Kaplan, 1971, p. 142)

Thus, to bring us a little closer to the case of metaphor, a sentence like 'He said it in this voice just like Akim Tamiroff' is in perfectly good order, and expresses a genuine thought. But of course it will not communicate much to someone who has never heard of Akim Tamiroff. This particular person and the experience of his voice are essential to the content of the proposition. To someone who has never heard this voice the speaker may quite straightforwardly be unable to communicate what she means. And it is all too easy to imagine being unable to provide any descriptive equivalent, and that no substitute expression will capture what you want to say. Yet it would certainly be wrong to conclude from this that the speaker has not said or meant anything. (For a defense of the idea of metaphorical meaning, which makes extensive use of the comparison with demonstratives, see Stern 1985 and 1991. See also chapter 18 here,

DEMONSTRATIVES.)

Similarly, with a metaphorical expression like the well-worn example of Juliet and the sun, reference to the sun is essential to the determination of the content of what Romeo has in mind, and his reluctance to accept any prose paraphrase as capturing all that he means is not itself any reason to deny that he does have something in mind which he is seeking to express in words. Nor would it be right to say that although he does have some content in mind (since we reject the simple sentential view of cognitive content), there must be some confusion involved in trying to express it verbally. Hence, to qualify a concession made earlier for the sake of argument, words may sometimes be the wrong medium of exchange for a picture, but it depends on what we are expecting the words to do. We may not be entirely satisfied with any descriptive translation of what was said in either the Akim Tamiroff or the Juliet cases, but even so it won't follow that "the attempt to give literal expression to the content of the metaphor is simply misguided" (Davidson, p. 263). As with any attempt to put one's thoughts and feelings into words, it may matter a great deal to try to go as far as one can in this direction. If we can't make sense of this kind of effort at descriptive and expressive fidelity, then we can't make sense of the kind of struggle that goes into the composition of poetic metaphor in the first place, let alone more everyday efforts to put the non-verbal world of experience into words.

(These considerations relate to the debate since Aristotle over whether metaphor and simile are essentially different figures. Fogelin (1988) and Dammann (1977) both defend a 'comparativist' view of metaphor, and insist on the distinction between figurative and non-figurative comparisons.)

5. Metaphor and Communication

The discussion thus far has suggested that neither vagueness nor the indeterminacy of the interpretation of metaphor provide good reasons for denying that metaphor has a cognitive content beyond the literal. And further, even if the difficulties or inadequacies of paraphrase are attributed to a degree of 'ineffability' (and not just indeterminacy) in what is seeking expression, this need not mean that we are not dealing with a genuine propositional content. Naturally these considerations do not by themselves constitute an account of figurative meaning. Many difficulties remain in making sense of meaning and content as applied to metaphor. These include various problems that were left hanging in the earlier discussion. For instance, we still need to describe a sense of 'meaning' as applied to metaphor, which doesn't reduce to ordinary ambiguity or the expansion of application of a term. We have not yet explained the special dependence of the figurative meaning on the literal meaning, a dependence that has so far only been described metaphorically as the literal meaning's still remaining 'alive' in the figurative context (i.e., unlike a code). And very little has been said so far to relate the sense of 'meaning' at stake here to more familiar uses of the term in ordinary speech and in more formal uses in the philosophy of language.

But lest we lose heart at the prospect of these and other problems for explicating the sense of figurative 'meaning', it would be worthwhile to remind ourselves of how serious the consequences would be of endorsing a fully non-cognitive account of metaphor of the sort Davidson and others have recommended. (The most comprehensive defense of the rejection of metaphorical meaning is David Cooper's 1986 book Metaphor (esp. chapter two).) It is

important to Davidson's view that it not be seen as "no more than an insistence on restraint in using the word 'meaning'", but rather as a rejection of the idea that "associated with a metaphor is a definite cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message".(p. 262) So, to begin with, any such theory is burdened with the same problems as is non-cognitivism elsewhere in philosophy. There will be nothing for understanding or misunderstanding a metaphorical utterance to consist in, nothing to the idea of getting it right or getting it wrong when we construe what the 'figurative meaning' might be. Related to this are non-cognitivism's familiar problems with making sense of the apparent facts of agreement and disagreement in the domain in question. For the rejection of any distinctive content to a metaphorical utterance obscures understanding of what, for instance, the negation or denial of such an utterance can mean. For such a denial will, in the ordinary case, be a denial of the utterance taken figuratively. If there is nothing to the idea of a distinctive figurative content, then there's nothing for the speaker's audience to be agreeing with or dissenting from, except for the statement taken literally, and agreement or disagreement with that statement is not to the point. Further, if the figurative dimension involves no difference in meaning, but instead simply 'nudges us into noticing some resemblance', then it's hard to say what differences of meaning we can point to between 'Juliet is the sun', 'Imagine Juliet as the sun', or even 'Juliet is not (or is no longer) the sun'. All three sentences succeed in linking the two ideas, but they hardly say the same thing. We might compare such problems with the difficulty for moral non-cognitivism in providing an account of the functioning of moral terms in conditional contexts, when some moral predicate is not being asserted, but is used in the context of reasoning and argument. (For more on these and other criticisms of non-cognitivism as applied to metaphor, see Bergmann (1982),

Elgin (1983), Kittay (1987), and Tirell (1989), as well as the papers mentioned previously in connection with Davidson.)

The cost of the denial of any specifically metaphorical content, then, seems rather steep, and the case for the banishment of metaphor from the realm of meaning to that of 'use' or the brute effects of utterance seems flawed. It is true that there are many things done in speech that do not involve communication and meaning, but are more purely causal effects of utterance (although, of course, communication is causal in its own way too). We are told, for instance, that metaphor gets us to notice things (similarities or incongruities, or whatever).

And it is in terms of such particularities of use that Davidson compares metaphor with the use of language to lie, persuade, or complain. However, a few things must be noted about this comparison. First, it is not at all clear that metaphor is a 'use' of language in this sense at all. It would not, for instance, serve as any explanation why someone said what she did simply to say she was speaking metaphorically. Further, lying or complaining can count as "belong[ing] exclusively to the domain of use" (p. 247), rather than meaning, precisely because whether one says 'It's raining out' to lie or to complain does not affect the truth conditions of the utterance. But, of course, whether the truth conditions of an utterance may indeed differ on a metaphorical interpretation is just the point at issue, and cannot be begged at this point.

And when we do speak of metaphor as producing various effects, it is important to note in the context of this discussion that it accomplishes these effects in a quite particular manner, one which involves a relationship between a speaker and an audience, and an interconnected network of beliefs about intentions, expectations and desires; in short, just the sort of situation that Paul Grice and others have argued is what differentiates a situation of meaning and

communication from the other various ways in which beliefs may be acquired (see chapter 9, 'INTENTION AND CONVENTION'). As Davidson notes, plenty of things, like a bump on the head, can get one to notice or appreciate something, even something profound, and we don't think of all such cases as involving anything like meaning or communication. However, metaphorical speech counts as genuinely communicative (of a content beyond the literal) because, among other things, the figurative interpretation of the utterance is guided by assumptions about the beliefs and intentions of the speaker, intentions which, among other things, satisfy the Gricean formula (intending that the intention be recognized by means of this very utterance). And because we are in this way dependent on beliefs about the speaker's beliefs, there is a purchase on the ideas of understanding and misunderstanding what was meant, none of which applies when some non-Intentional causal phenomenon succeeds in making one appreciate some fact.

The dependence of the hearer on beliefs about the speaker has several layers. To take the utterance as metaphorical in the first place requires assumptions about the beliefs and intentions of the speaker. Then, even the non-assertoric dimensions of the reception of metaphor (framing one thing in terms of another, the clash of images, etc.) are dependent on what we take the relevant dimensions of the comparison or contrast to be. Lacking any idea of the intended salient features of, say, music, food, and love, we would fail to have so much as a non-assertoric comparison or contrast of these elements, let alone a metaphorical assertion. And finally, the interpretation of the utterance involves assumptions about the speaker's beliefs about the various elements, including her beliefs about their salience to the audience, and about what, if any, particular attitude toward these things is expressed by the metaphor. None of these dependencies

obtain with respect to all the other various ways in which the phenomena of the world can cause one to be struck by something or other, and that is the primary reason why we speak of communication, understanding and misunderstanding in the one set of cases and not the other.

6. Pragmatics and Speaker's Meaning

These and other considerations have led many writers on the subject to identify the meaning of a metaphorical utterance with what is called the speaker's meaning, in contrast with the semantic meaning of the sentence. The latter notion concerns the meaning of a sentence in a given language, and is standardly understood to be a function of either its truth-conditions or ASSERTABILITY CONDITIONS, assuming a certain context. Speaker's meaning, by contrast, concerns what a speaker on an occasion may employ a sentence to imply or communicate, a content that may diverge more or less widely from the content assigned to the sentence by the language. Hence, in ironic speech, for example, a speaker may utter the words 'That was a brilliant thing to say', in order to communicate something quite different from what the sentence-type means in English. (The example of irony shows the usefulness of separating the issue of 'meaning-change' -- which patently does not apply to the words of an ironic utterance -- from the issues of communication and cognitivity.)

Speaker meaning will typically be an instance of what Grice has called 'conversational IMPLICATURE'. Very briefly, Grice sees linguistic behavior as guided by a general Cooperative Principle, which divides into various more particular maxims, such as 'Do not say what you believe to be false', or 'Be relevant', and which speakers expect to be obeyed in

conversational exchange. Naturally any such maxim may fail to be observed on a given occasion (people do tell lies, for instance). But what is important to Grice's story is the different ways in which a maxim may not be observed. For it may not be followed either through sheer carelessness, or because the speaker in 'opting out' of the conversational exchange altogether, or, most importantly here, the speaker may 'flout' a maxim. In such a case the speaker makes it manifestly clear that, on one level at least, she is intentionally violating some maxim. In the above example of speaking ironically, the speaker takes it to be clear to the audience that she does not think what was just said was brilliant, and yet here she is uttering a sentence with that very meaning. Hence she is flouting one of Grice's 'Maxims of Quality' ('Do not say what you believe to be false'). At this point it is up to the hearer to construe what the point of the utterance could be, what other proposition(s) may be intended. The general assumption of the Cooperative Principle is retained, but the hearer now looks for what proposition may be implicated by this utterance. Thus conversational implicature is a means of communicating something different from the literal semantic meaning of the sentence uttered.

Taking this general approach, John Searle takes the general formula for metaphor to be: A speaker utters a sentence with (semantic) meaning 'S is P', but does so in order to convey (or 'implicate') a different proposition, namely 'S is R'. In Searle's example, someone says 'X is a block of ice' in order to convey the very different proposition that X is emotionally unresponsive, etc. In most cases it will be the manifest or categorical falsity of the sentence taken literally that cues the audience to interpret the utterance as implicating something metaphorically. The main questions Searle takes a theory of metaphor to be responsible for are, then, how a utterance is recognized as metaphorical (rather than ironic, say), and what principles the hearer employs to

compute the speaker's meaning from the meaning of the sentence uttered, combined with the context of utterance.

An account of this general form may, then, offer us a sense of 'meaning' as applied to metaphor, which does not entail that a linguistic entity as such somehow contains within itself a metaphorical as well as a literal (semantic) meaning, but one which is nonetheless a sense of 'meaning' which bears some important relation to meaning in the strictly semantic sense. It also offers some understanding of the special dependence of the figurative on the literal, in that it is only through comprehension of the literal meaning of the statement that the hearer may reach the secondary meaning 'implicated' by the utterance. And the principles that guide this interpretation will involve appeal to features of resemblance, contrast, context, and emotional attitudes toward the subject that make the relation between literal and figurative meaning very much unlike the relation between a word and its substitution in some code.

In addition, such a view need not subsume 'figurative meaning' under the categories of simple ambiguity and ordinary expansion of meaning. Gricean implicature involves there being some point to the speaker's application of this phrase, with this literal meaning, in this context, in order to convey something quite different. Common ambiguity (e.g., homonymy) does not involve any such point or communicative intent. Nor need there be any such point in the case of the ordinary expansion of the application of a term. In some cases there may be some such point to the expanding, but often there will not be. When there is some point to the extension (as in, e.g., the extending of 'mouth' to parts of bottles and rivers) the motivation may simply concern some perceived similarity between the various things now referred to by the same term (Davidson's example). In those cases the theorist of 'speaker-meaning' will indeed need to

distinguish the point of metaphorical speech from that of ordinary extension of the application of a term without any communicative point; otherwise he fails to distinguish figurative meaning from some forms of ordinary ambiguity . On the other hand, one may not want to distinguish the two cases too sharply, because metaphor is, after all, one of the vehicles of the normal extension of the application of words. Sometimes when metaphors die, their death involves the alteration of the ordinary dictionary-meaning of a term, as in the case of 'mouth'. This phenomenon is in fact a further problem for any view that denies any distinct cognitive content to live metaphor. For it is clear that part of the meaning of the word 'mouth' is different now from what it was prior to the development of the metaphor, and yet we would not be able to say where the difference in meaning came from if the metaphor had no content aside from the (old) literal one when the metaphor was alive. By the same token, this would also, of course, oblige the theorist of speaker-meaning, for whom the distinction between it and semantic-meaning is crucial, to say something about the diachronic story of how speaker-meaning becomes 'regularized' over time and merges into an altered semantic-meaning of the term.

There are thus some promising features of this general approach, but its application and explanatory power also seem to have some significant limitations. First of all, it's not clear, on Searle's version of the theory anyway, that much has been said to elucidate the specifically figurative dimension of metaphor. If what one is doing in speaking metaphorically is saying (or making-as-if-to-say) 'S is P' in order to convey the different proposition 'S is R', then it is hard to see how anything in the way of special insight or enhanced apprehension of the subject is achieved in this way. And it doesn't seem enough to make up for the flat quality of the analysis to add, as Searle does, that the speaker may intend "an indefinite range of meanings, S is R₁, S is

R₂, etc." (p. 115). No degree of indefiniteness alone will add up to power or insightfulness.

(And if one is skeptical of the claims made for insight and metaphor, the criticism would remain that even the appearance of power or insight -- which surely does require explaining -- seems to find no place in this account.) Related to this is the problem, common to many accounts that want to emphasize the cognitive aspect of metaphors, and their role in assertion, that the account seems derived from the consideration of only the dead and dying among metaphors. And even this class is normally restricted to examples of the familiar subject-predicate form. Whereas, clearly a major part of the theoretical interest in metaphor concerns the desire to understand what is deeply right or expressive or illuminating in such occurrences of live metaphor as in the dense figurative networks of literature, which need not involve any phrases in subject-predicate form, or be part of any statement of fact (either real or pretended). (By comparison, we might ask here how a caricature or a gesture can be 'right' or expressive or illuminating.)

A further way in which the 'live' quality of live metaphor seems to escape this analysis is in the account of how interpretation proceeds and what the derived meaning consists in. For if the meaning of a metaphorical utterance is the speaker's meaning, and the latter is a function of the intentions of the speaker in making the utterance, then the meaning of metaphor in general will be confined to the intentions of the speaker. Interpretation of the metaphor, then, will be a matter of the recovery of the intentions of the speaker. This may do well enough for instances of well-worn metaphor with little suggestive power left, but it gives the wrong picture of the interpretation of live metaphor. As Cooper says, in criticism of the 'speaker's meaning' view, "even a quite definite speaker-intention does not finally determine the meaning of a metaphor" (p. 73). It is consistent with this criticism to insist, as claimed earlier here, that the interpreter of

a metaphor is dependent on various assumptions about the beliefs and intentions of the speaker, and that this is required even to achieve a sense of what sort of figurative comparison is relevant. For it does not follow from this claim that the interpretation of metaphor is restricted to the recovery of the speaker's intentions. The interpreter may need to presume various things about the beliefs of the speaker for the metaphor to succeed in picturing one thing in terms of another, but once that perspective has been adopted, the interpretation of the light it sheds on its subject may outrun anything the speaker is thought explicitly to have had in mind. And on the other hand, from the point of view of the speaker, the restriction to speaker meaning seems inadequate in that it construes metaphor as a kind of shorthand or mnemonic device for a given set of beliefs that she wishes to convey. What such a picture leaves out of consideration is the role of metaphor in thought, the fact that the composition of live metaphor is undertaken in the expectation that it will lead one's thoughts about the subject in a certain direction; that it will be productive of new thought about it, and is not just a convenient summing up of beliefs one already has.

(The comparison of metaphor with models in science has inspired work on metaphor as a vehicle, and not just a depository, of thought. On this, see various papers in Ortony 1979. This general point, however, is not restricted to the case where a metaphor functions as a kind of explanatory model, but applies as well to the composition of metaphor in everyday and poetic cases, where it is not functioning as a model for explanation. This aspect of 'metaphorical thought' has received considerably less attention in recent philosophy.)

7. Metaphor, Rhetoric and Relevance

We have arrived, then, at a familiar point of tension for theories of metaphor. On the one hand, there is the desire (widespread, but not universal) to see metaphor as a cognitive phenomena and hence as having a describable role in such activities as assertion, communication, and reasoning. But on the other hand, theories of metaphor that seek to defend and define this cognitive role often end up obscuring the very features of metaphor that make it an object of theoretical interest in the first place; e.g. its figurative power, the role of metaphor in expressing or producing insight of some kind, or the special open-ended role of the interpretation of live metaphor. It is no surprise, then, that 'non-cognitive' theorists like Davidson emphasize the difference between live and dead metaphors, whereas 'cognitive' theorists often either downplay the distinction or deal with examples of metaphor that might as well be dead.

To make progress from here, it may be useful to re-orient our approach to the whole phenomenon, and consider cognition and communication outside the context of strictly linguistic activity, and begin investigating them from this broader perspective prior to explicit theorizing about the case of metaphor. That is, instead of taking the determinate proposition expressible in a simple sentence as our paradigm, and then asking how closely metaphor may or may not approach this model, we might begin with communicative situations that are non-verbal, indefinite and unstructured, and ask where we might locate metaphorical speech on a continuum of cases, from there to explicit, literal speech. This is more or less the approach taken by Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson in their book Relevance, and in subsequent publications on rhetoric and communication. They see linguistic communication as but one variety of the larger class of what they call 'ostensive-inferential communication', which encompasses "behavior which makes

manifest an intention to make something manifest" (p. 49). (Their account has obvious points of contact with Grice's work, as well as important differences with it, and these are discussed in the book.). The breadth of the category of communication they employ, and the distance from the sentential paradigm, can be seen from one of their first examples of ostension, many of whose features have come up for discussion in the case of metaphor. Two people are newly arrived at the seaside, and one of them opens the window of their room and inhales appreciatively and 'ostensively', i.e, in a manner addressed to the other person. This person thus has his attention drawn to an indefinite host of impressions of the air, the sea, memories of previous holidays, etc.

[Although] he is reasonably safe in assuming that she must have intended him to notice at least some of them, he is unlikely to be able to pin her intentions down any further. Is there any reason to assume that her intentions were more specific? Is there a plausible answer, in the form of an explicit linguistic paraphrase, to the question, what does she mean? Could she have achieved the same communicative effect by speaking? Clearly not. (p. 55-6)

If this sort of situation is accepted as an example of communication, we can see how many of the features of metaphor which are thought to stand in the way of any cognitive account, find a natural place here; and the case of explicit, literal, verbal communication looks more like the special case. That is, the way may be open to see some types of verbal communication (e.g., figurative language) as sharing many of the features of this non-verbal example. Thus we could see metaphorical speech as involving dependence on beliefs about the speaker's intentions but not restricted in its interpretation to the recovery of those intentions. We could speak of a content that is communicated, but which is to a significant degree indeterminate, resistant to

paraphrase, and open to the elaborative interpretation of the hearer. And, since the account does not assume literalness as a norm, we could avoid the implication of a generally Gricean approach that speaking figuratively, for all its utter pervasiveness in everyday speech, must involve transgression of some sort, or the violation of linguistic rules. (See ibid., p. 200: "[T]here is no connection between conveying an implicature and violating a pragmatic principle or maxim." See also Cooper 1986 on the 'perversity' objection to speaker-meaning theories. It should be noted that the rejection of the normative presumption of literalness does not entail the rejection of the previously described dependence of the figurative on the literal; i.e., the idea that knowledge of the literal semantic meanings of the words involved is necessary for the composition or comprehension of metaphor.)

Here we can do no more than indicate a few of the main themes of their approach which relate to the case of figurative language. Sperber and Wilson see implicatures as being conveyed in speech not through a presumption of either literality or obedience to conversational maxims, but through the guarantee of relevance which, they claim, any act of ostensive communication carries with it. Such acts will lie on a continuum of cases from communication of an impression to coded information, from showing to saying. In fact, it is internal to this approach that various dimensions of assessment normally construed categorically will be such as to admit of differences of degree: literality and figurativeness, evocativeness, susceptibility to paraphrase, and degree-of-intendedness.

Relevance, as defined by them, concerns the value of information gained, in light of the cognitive 'cost' to the hearer of assimilating that information. (As the quoted example indicates, however, 'information' is a suitably broad notion here too.) The guarantee of relevance may go

unfulfilled, of course, but it is different from a maxim that one either seeks to conform to or not. Relevance is guaranteed in the sense that any act of ostensive communication involves a claim on the attention of another person, and any such claim itself communicates the presumption that this attention is somehow worth the effort. Implicatures themselves may be weak or strong, far to seek or immediately obvious, and are related to each other in various ways. In this way, we may begin to have at least a useful description of the functioning of live or poetic metaphor, where the effort at interpretation generates a penumbra of stronger and weaker implications which in turn lead to others, more or less remote from the immediate inferential consequences of the utterance, but which are pursued insofar as the presumption of relevance is rewarded. Dead metaphors will be those with a relatively small network of implications, immediately comprehended at small cost. Along these lines, then, we may begin to be able to say a few things about what the figurative power of poetic metaphor consists in, and what claims can be made for it as both productive as well as expressive of insight of various kinds (including, for instance, marking the difference between the 'live' or fully-felt appreciation of some fact, and its merely 'intellectual' apprehension).

* * *

A final note: The alternatives to non-cognitivism discussed here have been drawn from theories of conversation, or the pragmatics of language, rather than semantic theories for natural languages. However, the semantic/pragmatic distinction in philosophy of language is itself a complex matter and a subject of controversy. Thus, mention should be made of recent 'cognitive' accounts which explicitly challenge the assignment of figurative meaning exclusively to either

one level of analysis or the other. So, for instance, Kittay (1987) describes her 'semantic field' theory of metaphor as one that moves between semantic and pragmatic accounts. And the work of Stern's mentioned earlier belongs to a broadly semantic account, but finds the analysis of both metaphor and demonstratives to require "A notion of meaning one level more abstract than truth conditions." (1991, p. 40). In these as well as other ways discussed previously, we can see the theory of figurative language prompting the re-thinking of some of the basic concepts in the philosophy of language generally.

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